

Comprehensive Biochemistry

Edited by Marcel Florkin and Elmer H. Stotz

Volumes 33A and 33B, *A History of Biochemistry*
Part V. The Unravelling of Biosynthetic Pathways

by Marcel Florkin

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Volume 33A, xx + 433 pages. \$68.30, Dfl 140.00; Volume 33B, xix + 320 pages. \$52.70; Dfl 108.00

These two volumes complete the five volume History of Biochemistry, the first having appeared in 1972 when the author was 72 years old. This is the first comprehensive history since F. Lieben, *Geschichte der Physiologischen Chemie*, published in 1935, though selected fields of the history have been treated with great distinction in J. S. Fruton's 'Molecules and Life' (1972).

Florkin covered, virtually single-handed, an enormous field, in spite of being plagued with ill-health since 1969, and he completed the present two volumes only shortly before he died, on 3 May 1979. The last two volumes have the subtitle 'The Unravelling of Biosynthetic Pathways'. References include papers published in the 1970s. The work is a thorough summary of the area of biochemistry defined in the subtitle. The vast literature has been critically sifted to find material relevant to the subject's gradual progress. Some work which seemed interesting when first published but which, in the end, proved irrelevant or erroneous is also referred to. Of special value are the many detailed quotations from original papers. Those who wish to make themselves familiar with the background and early history of present research will find useful information in this work.

Florkin, in his five volumes, limits himself essentially to classical biochemistry. The biochemistry of nucleic acids, of protein synthesis and genetics (the area generally referred to as molecular biology) is not covered. The names of Crick and Perutz do not occur in the name index, nor do the words 'messenger RNA' and 'transfer RNA' appear in the subject index. It would indeed be too much to expect coverage of this huge new area by a single author.

My guess is that the five volumes of Florkin's history will remain a standard work of reference for many decades after the other volumes of 'Comprehensive Biochemistry' have become obsolete. This, of course, is not to find fault with the other volumes; it is in the nature of rapidly developing fields that a reference work describing the present state of the subject will sooner or later be out of date.

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